L. Lemon 8-6 (1905-27) 1000 FFS Tanala FFS

VIII. RELIGION

The outstanding feature of Tanala religion is its extreme practicality. All its energies are directed toward acquiring benefits or averting misfortunes. There is no place in it for the mystic, the philosopher or the theologian. Its practices are stereotyped, with minute attention to detail, but most of its beliefs are vague and imperfectly formulated. In the absence of any organized religious authority most of them have remained matters of personal opinion and I found a wide divergence in all but a few main points among even the priests and medicine-men. To make this account intelligible, it has been necessary to introduce a somewhat greater systematization than exists in the native mind. 771

Beliefs

COSMOLOGY

The Tanala believe the earth to be flat, with the sky fitting down over it like a bell glass. There is a wide expanse of sea in which are two islands, Madagascar and another, vaguely known as *Anilefy* ("over there"). Some thought *Anilefy* was the same as the island of Reunion, of which they had heard. All foreigners, irrespective of race or color, are supposed to come from this other island. 772

Above the sky, which is thought of as a solid, material shell, there is another world. This is inhabited by the gods and possibly by the souls of the dead. The natives have no beliefs as to its appearance or nature and seem to have no name for it. Below the earth there is a third world, called *Tsimaloumena*. This is a rich and fertile country exactly like the world we live in. Informants were not sure whether the geographic features of our world were reproduced there point for point, but thought not. *Tsimaloumena* is connected with our world by very deep lakes and rivers, and persons who dive deep enough may catch a glimpse of it. It is inhabited by a race called *tsimaloumenampo*, who are like men in all respects except that their noses are set crosswise on their faces. They live in villages, raise rice, etc., like ordinary mortals. The Tanala have no legends of human beings having visited it and say the souls of the dead do not go there.

The belief in superimposed worlds seems to be universal among the more primitive pagan tribes of Madagascar, as does the belief that the entrance to the lower world is through lakes and rivers.

• 772 The plateau tribes have legends of human women being carried off to the under world. If they steadfastly refused to eat, the people there would take pity on them and send them back, but if they ate they could not return.

775 It is interesting to conjecture whether the under world was ever considered the abode of the dead. No such belief is held by any of the groups with whom I worked, but certain practices seem to suggest it. There is an ancient Tanala belief that the soul is drawn back after death to the place where its afterbirth was buried. On the southeast coast each tribe has a sacred river. Unless the umbilical cord of an individual has been thrown into this river, he is not considered a member of the gens, no matter what his descent, and he is debarred from burial in the common tomb. This, in turn, delays his soul from joining those of the ancestors. The tomb is built beside the sacred river when possible and all important ancestral sacrifices are performed on its banks. In some cases part of the blood of the sacrifice must be thrown into the water. There is also a belief in malevolent human spirits who live in the water and are responsible for sudden drownings. Although there is no proof, it seems highly probable that it was once believed that the dead went to the under world through the rivers, returning by the same route to receive the sacrifices.

821 Tanala ideas in regard to the heavenly bodies are vague. The sun *masoandro* ("day's eye") is said to be a ball of fire, but there is no explanation of its motion. At sunset it descends through a hole in the western end of our world and traverses the sky of the under world during our night, rising again through a hole in the east. One account of the Tanala says that they believe that the sun travels back *over our sky* during the night, but all informants whom I asked considered this ridiculous and it certainly is not the present belief.

The moon, *volondava*, is a ball of some shining substance, which moves across the heavens of the middle and under worlds on the same track as the sun. None of my informants had ever heard a myth explaining its changes, although its phases were named. The new moon is *volondava*, first quarter *rindondorova*, full moon *ravifotsy*, and dark of the moon *matevolona*. There seems to be no name for the last quarter.

The stars are said to be "things fastened to the sky." Apparently only three groupings of stars are recognized: *Ejidavoina*, the Milky Way, *Kotokely mifidisaga* (lit. "children who fight for a rice mortar"),